DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 162 569 SE 010 648

AUTHOR Fenton, Joann C.
TITLE Academic Norms and the University Committee.
PUB DATE 25 Mar 78
NOTE 15p.; Presented at the Symposium on Structure and Context in Complex Societies, Southwestern Anthropological Association (San Francisco, March 23-25, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Administration; *College Environment; College Faculty; College Role; College Students; Governance; Higher Education; *Institutional Characteristics; Interaction Process Analysis; Organizational Change; Organizational Climate; Peer Relationship; Research Projects; *State Colleges; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Urban Universities

ABSTRACT

The metropolitan university is viewed from the context of individual, group, and university level of social interaction. Metropolitan universities are defined as state-supported public universities located in urban areas and legislatively mandated as teaching institutions. Resources are usually dependent upon the number of full-time equivalent students registered in classes. Metropolitan universities are contrasted to cosmopolitan universities, where a major responsibility of the academic is research, and the ethos is individualistic. Cosmopolitan universities have been characterized as trans-national and elitist, and a large number of the student body is graduate students. In contrast, the metropolitan university has been characterized as local and non-elitist. Attention is focused on the undergraduate student body, and graduate programs are confined largely to the master's degree. Students are often part-time, holding down jobs in the community. Research tends to be engaged in by a small number of faculty working alone rather than in grant-supported research centers. The characteristics of one metropolitan university are described, and the role of research and interpersonal relationships between faculty, between faculty and students, and between faculty and administrators are discussed. The impact of a change in the university from a centralized administration to the university committee is analyzed. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SEP 08 1978

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Joann Fenton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

ED162569

HE010648

ACADEMIC NORMS AND THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Joann C. Fenton

In their ontological development and social adaptation, human beings continually research the cognitive residues of past experience for metaphors which will help them interpret current experiences. In this way they are able to create relevance out of new contexts. Over time, through interaction, some of these metaphors may begin to dominate in the sense that they come to serve as catalysts of change in the structure of an institution. Other metaphors may never disappear from the setting. They may continue to be activated on an infra-structural level, which allows for the expression and satisfaction of individual needs and objectives but at the same time promotes continuing contradictions between individual and group goals. Rituals may emerge to resolve the contradictions and symbolize unity of purpose within the institution.[1]

This paper concerns a specific context--a metropolitan university--in which individuals are observed coming together and creating contextual relevance on individual, group and university levels of social interaction.

Over the last decade or so the country witnessed a mushrooming of what have been called "metropolitan universities," public universities which are state supported, are located in urban areas and are legisla-

tively mandated as teaching institutions. These universities are usually formula-driven; that is, resources are dependent upon the number of full-time equivalent students registered in classes. Many of these universities have staffed their tenure-track positions with the offspring of what have been called by Reynold Feldman (1977) "cosmopolitan universities."

The Cosmopolitan University

If the unique cultural traditions of each of these cosmopolitan universities and the fact that some of them are perceived as more representative of the stereotype than others are ignored for ease of contrast, Feldman's characterization of this type of university as transnational and elitist is useful. Where this university is located--large city, small city or town--matters little. The cosmopolitan university "transcends both time and place." It embraces, produces and competes for internationally renowned research centers and for award-winning faculty and students who are selected from the world's intellectual elite. Offering a wide range of doctoral programs, its graduate students equal and sometimes exceed its undergraduate students in number. Faculty and students are involved in basic or primary research in many fields and often in topical, grant-supported research centers which reinforce a sense of the value and legitimacy of the research endeavor.

The graduate student in one of these universities comes to

perceive a pattern in academic life and inculcates a version of its norms. Setting aside the entailments of status and role relations and the subject of fundamental values of higher education, the essence of these expectations may be characterized as one of production. A major responsibility of the academic is research, the results of which are expected to be made available to the academic community in publications. One could say that the exchange orientation here is one of generalized reciprocity on a national or international scale.

The ethos of the cosmopolitan university is individualistic. Even in research centers where a greater sense of community may obtain, research and writing require psychological if not physical withdrawal from others for long periods of time. To a considerable extent, the administrative structure is designed to support and facilitate individual production objectives. The productivity of individuals contributes to the prestige and continuing viability of the university, and the faculty who evince dedication to this endeavor accrue respect and recognition.

Another major responsibility of the faculty in the cosmopolitan university is the teaching of students, especially graduate students who will be prepared to carry on the traditions of higher education. A generally shared belief of members of this tradition is that to be a good teacher, one must be a good researcher, although it is sometimes allowed that research is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for

good teaching.

The usual message given graduate students in the cosmopolitan university is that they must stand or fall on their own. Yet their actual experiences may contradict the normative messages. For some students individualism is the pattern that does obtain. These students may relate to faculty primarily by way of their products. Papers and dissertation drafts may be evaluated by faculty at a distance and little interpersonal interaction between student and teacher take place outside the classroom. The individualistic ethos of the university is not only reflected in the relationship between faculty and students but also among students themselves. Sometimes, however, graduate students bond together, not necessarily out of predilection but for survival, especially when faculty distancing is perceived as overly threatening. Students may come to cooperate with and help one another in multiple ways, sometimes to the point that a "one for all and all for one" ethos obtains. Those who exhibit signs of competitiveness are usually ostracized from the group.

Another type of relationship a graduate student may develop in his/her graduate training is a more exclusive one with a particular faculty member. This teacher may assume one of two roles toward the student: mentor or patron. The mentor tends to attract relatively mature students whose learning is facilitated in a particular field until they are ready to depart. It is a relationship that predicts eventual equality. The patron on the other hand tends to take on the more

insecure students, and the relationship is predicated on the basis of inequality. These are students who tend to comply with faculty requests for personal services and favors. In return they are often protected by the patron, although they can also be discarded when their usefulness ends.

Graduates of the cosmopolitan university therefore have varied experiences and models in their socialization into academia. These experiences are not unconnected to other experiences in life. Graduate school, however, is a formative period and certain predispositions may be more firmly developed or reinforced than others, depending on the university, the department or discipline, and the individuals interacted with on a recurring basis.

The Metropolitan University

Feldman (1977) has characterized the "metropolitan university" as local and non-elitist. Students and faculty are more often than not drawn from the area in which the university is located so that "a sense of place rather than a sense of the institution's place in the world" usually obtains. Attention is focused on the undergraduate student body and graduate programs are confined largely to the master's degree. The student body--graduate and undergraduate--is to a considerable extent part-time, holding down jobs elsewhere in the community. Admission to and retention in the university are easier and more students are less well-prepared for academic work. Grants are more often awarded the

metropolitan university for instructionally-related projects than for basic research. Research tends to be engaged in by a small number of faculty working alone rather than in grant-supported research centers.

From this point, I am confining my description to one metropolitan university setting. The university pictured here is about fifteen years old and has an enrollment of about 6,500 students. The student population is multiethnic and represents a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The average age of students is now 29 years. Many students work; a growing number of them work full-time and attend the university part time. Most students are upper classmen, juniors and seniors, who have graduated from community colleges in the area.

The faculty, with some exceptions, are primarily Ph.D.s from universities within the state, particularly several in the general area in which the university is located. They are relatively young in age and in general their teaching experience has been confined to this university. Teaching is legislatively mandated as the primary mission of the university; a normal faculty teaching load is twelve hours per week. Twelve-fifteenths of a faculty's salary is allocated for teaching; three fifteenths for student advising and other services to the university, such as departmental, school and university committee participation. For retention, promotion or tenure, faculty are evaluated for their performance in three areas: teaching, which is primary, scholarly

activities and institutional or community service.

Class enrollment, student teaching evaluations, students' curricular needs and interests, student-based funding and departmental survival are intricately linked in such a way that the relationship between group requisites and individual needs and motivations is a dynamic, complex and situationally determined one. An individualistic ethos at the structural level of the institution is not a viable one.

During the first decade of the university's development, the number of students and faculty steadily increased so that at any one time a large percentage of the faculty were new or still on probation. It was a period marked by a high degree of ambiguity as individuals attempted to make sense of the context and create a definition of self in relation to one another and to the institution. This was made somewhat more difficult by the fact that the university was established in the Sixties when students were vigorously expressing and demanding institutionalization of some of the values which had remained latent for a long time in universities everywhere--egalitarianism, freedom of choice, relevancy of education to everyday life, etc.

I am unable to detail all of the metaphors which were and are deployed by faculty to create a cognitive synthesis of their experiences within the university. Given the fact that many of these faculty were just out of graduate school, I think that some of these can be traced most directly to experiences incurred there, and that, consciously or unconsciously, those experiences have served as metaphors for creating

contextual relevance in this setting.

One metaphor is predictable: the individualistic researcher-producer. Those who deploy this metaphor give evidence of seeing themselves as representatives of and participants in the Great Tradition of higher education. Their primary objectives are to engage in research leading to publications and to impart knowledge from their specializations to students to bring them into contact with a more cosmopolitan world. They tend to concentrate upon those students who share their interests and to encourage those who are better prepared academically to go on to graduate school. Their research activities necessitate that they be absent or unavailable to others in the university a good portion of the time. Some of them, especially those who participate minimally in departmental curricular development and planning, student advising and key committees in the university, are resented by others who view their behavior as self centered. In turn, some of these individuals express resentment of encroachments upon their time and evaluate others' behavior as nonproductive and a dereliction of duty to their profession. They sometimes also express a sense of loneliness not because of what they do but because what they do is not joined or given recognition by others. Some of these individuals have deployed the normative model of the cosmopolitan university to this context and see the university as failing to support basic values of higher education. Over time, however, some of them have modified this model in significant and adaptive ways.

Another metaphor which created contextual relevance for faculty was that of collegiality, derived perhaps most directly from experiences of student bonding in graduate school. When the collegial model comes to prevail in a department there sometimes emerges the "one for all and all for one" sentiment in which corporate interests supersede those of individuals. Faculty may even vie with one another in contributing to and foregoing personal interests for the department's viability in the university, although rivalry is not a distinguishing attribute of this style of relating to others.

A limited survey of perceived job rewards conducted by a class of students in 1975 showed that faculty of one of the collegially-minded departments cited friendships with other faculty as the highest ranking reward of their job. Members of this department were of the opinion that friendship affiliations both were and should be a significant reward.

Many of these faculty tended to perceive the student-faculty relationship as a collegial one with each associate (student and teacher) broadening one another's horizons.

It is possible that the collegial metaphor created contextual relevance for faculty for reasons similar to those that helped promote graduate student bonding: the environment was perceived as overly threatening. Many faculty, most of whom were white, saw themselves in the last decade as having been inadequately prepared to teach students, especially minority students, what they wanted and needed

to learn. Many, for example, had never heard of Black English and some, on reading their first set of essay exams, thought they were the victims of a student prank. The collegial metaphor was one way of dealing cognitively with a situation which threatened the self-image or -respect of both faculty and students.

Another factor contributed to the faculty's sense of vulnerability. The relationship between the faculty and the administration was often seen as an antagonistic one. The governance structure of the institution was centralized and hierarchical, and many administrators were perceived as distant, patronizing or dictatorial. In the survey cited earlier, most of the collegially-oriented cited poor relations with administrators as one of the most frustrating aspects of their job. These were individuals who were frequently elected to serve on faculty committees and came into contact more often with administration. Through their participation in personnel and curriculum review committees as well as the faculty senate, these faculty had some impact on the way many of their peers --regardless of their philosophies or metaphors--actually performed in the university.

Another frustration cited by these faculty was research. When questioned, some indicated that they lacked adequate time for research; others indicated that this was not supposed to be a research institution and the message handed down to faculty was that teaching was the most important criterion for personnel evaluation but that when their performance was reviewed, especially by administrators, they were criticized for not

demonstrating a capacity for scholarship. To the latter, scholarship had a broader meaning than publications.

Other metaphors have been used by faculty for creating contextual relevance. For example, mentors and patrons are present, but there are many others. Metaphors are commonly altered to fit a particular context and faculty not only continuously adjust and refine but also switch metaphors at different stages of their adaptation. Some faculty, of course, have not adapted; unable to create synthesis out of the apparent contradictions, some have resigned, others have chosen to retreat from the university to as great an extent as possible and still keep their jobs, still others have sought help in psychotherapy and some have turned to alcohol.

An observation made by an off-campus candidate for an administrative position at the university several years ago is worth repeating here. He was puzzled by a seeming paradox: the faculty generally appeared committed to the university but seemed to have a low image of themselves. Perhaps few faculty, whatever their metaphors, were able to gratify a need for recognition of their problems and efforts.

Two years ago a new president was appointed to the university. In less than a year, his metaphor for creating contextual relevance was presented to the general faculty: This university was a People's University, he maintained, which was something different from a Harvard or a University of Chicago, and the mission of the institution was to provide students a quality education. The governance system of the

university was restructured that year, based now upon a decentralized, collegial model. I believe that support for this decision to reorganize, *if not the original impetus*, came largely through the president's conversations with collegially-oriented faculty. The faculty senate was given responsibility for policy recommendations that it had not previously had. Several committees were instituted to select and evaluate administrators, to review program planning and to establish resource allocation priorities. Staff, students, faculty and administrators were represented on these and other committees which proliferated on all levels of the university.

These events generated some interesting responses on the part of faculty as well as members of other constituencies on campus. First, the presidential metaphor was variously interpreted. To some, a People's University meant that lower standards were being condoned; to others, that vocational and professional interests were being given priority over liberal arts; to others, it meant that academic pluralism was being acknowledged as a legitimate institutional goal. A marked increase in conversations about the future of the university ensued. The president's speech to the general faculty generated in the minds of many a critical question: Is there an inherent contradiction in being a People's University and providing a quality education?

Secondly, whereas university committees were perceived in the past as instruments of the administration and symbolized faculty (and staff) powerlessness, they have come increasingly to symbolize a place of conception for a recreation and rejuvenation of the university.

Perceiving an opportunity for having an impact on policy, educators of diverse positions, educational philosophies and self images are joining and participating to a degree that some visitors to the campus have questioned whether the current momentum, which requires a considerable investment of time and energy on the part of participants, can be maintained without the university's experiencing a severe loss in administrative efficiency and teaching vitality.

No one is certain what is going to emerge from all this activity. It is clear, however, that old metaphors and self images are undergoing change. Former barriers between professional and liberal arts Schools, e.g., are beginning to erode as old antagonists entertain the possibility of sharing resources. Some faculty, including some of the researcher-producers, who have recently acquired semi-administrative experience through committee chair positions are reconsidering career goals and contemplating a future in administration. Others, including some of the collegially-oriented, have recently instituted community-oriented research centers and projects.

In short, the university committee--rather than a centralized administration--has become both a vehicle for resolving educational contradictions and a symbol validating unity of commitment despite diversity.

Perhaps a comment made by an off-campus candidate for an administrative appointment this year is worth noting in closing: "The faculty here certainly seem to be overworked. But morale

seems high. "

[1]This paper was one of a number presented at the Symposium on Structure and Context in Complex Societies at the Southwestern Anthropoligical Association, March 23-25, 1978, meeting in San Francisco. The organizer of the symposium was E. T. Jacob-Pandian, who provided the organizing idea for the papers: the creation of contextual relevance in new and complex settings through the metaphorical deployment of symbols from earlier contexts in individual's experience. Thanks are also owed Lisa Gray-Shellberg, who provided insightful suggestions for an earlier draft of the paper.

Feldman, Reynold
1977 Planning Implications of the Urban University: The Case of Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago. The Innovator, Vol. IV. (No. 2): 2-7